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ABSTRACT

Having a sound budget based on an effective school philosophy is one way to provide for quality programming in reservation schools. The Ganado Unified School District, located on the Arizona part of the Navajo Reservation, attempted to decentralize the budget-making process and to study whether the current budget effectively supported the school's programming direction. The district formed a budget task force composed of teachers, staff, and administrators, and adopted a Program Planning Budget System. The task force organized staff-teacher brainstorming sessions focusing on the current curriculum, program strengths and weaknesses, needs, and the school philosophy, which had previously been largely ignored. The task force translated the brainstorming results into a needs assessment, then categorized each needs statement under one of the school's eight philosophical goals, assigning a priority, a monetary commitment, and a time frame to each emerging objective. Consequently, in 3 weeks, the task force established 1-, 3-, and 5-year budget plans geared to the school's philosophy. Using the new budget-making process, the staff gained a better understanding of school budgets, accepted responsibility for effective budget planning, established justifiable budgets, identified alternative financing, considered personnel reassignments, and refined the school's philosophy. (SB)

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DEVELOPING AN EFFECTIVE SCHOOL BUDGET IN THE RESERVATION SCHOOL: PPBS AND THE SCHOOL PHILOSOPHY

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DEVELOPING AN EFFECTIVE SCHOOL BUDGET IN THE RESERVATION SCHOOL: PPBS AND THE SCHOOL PHILOSOPHY

Resevation school administrators are responsible for making million dollar budgetary decisions. In doing so, some administrators fail to consider that those decisions must reflect the school's philosophy and must support its intended curriculum direction. Although this type of budget management dictates a degree of introspection that may be time consuming, it does increase the legitimacy of the administrator's budget decisions.

Budget management is a complex process by which the reservation administrator implements and maintains programming which supports the achievement of the ideals imbedded in the school philosophy. The budget must provide for the immediate, short-term needs of the school as well as provide for the maintenance of the on-going, long-term goals and objectives. The school budget must also be flexible enough to effectively accomodate funding windfalls and cut-backs. With all these concerns and pressures it is no wonder that some administrators would simply submit a line-item proposal based on a percentage factor of the previous year. Such was not the case at Ganado Primary School this year, where it was felt that there was a better

way to establish and defend a budget.

Background

The Ganado Public School District is located on the Arizona portion of the Navajo Reservation with a predominately Navajo student population. During the 1983-84 academic year, a Budget Task Force was formed. The primary purpose for the development of the Task Force was to decentralize the budget-making process. The primary goal of the Task Force was to study the effectiveness of present budget in supporting the programming direction.

As strategies were discussed at the public school for the development of the next fiscal year's budget, PPBS (Program Planning Budgeting Systems) was suggested as an alternative. Since the reservation school operates from a team-approach, copies of an overview to PPBS were distributed to members of the School's IIC (Instructional Improvement Committee). The strengths of PPBS were viewed as being: (1) provisions for a significant amount of staff input, (2) establishment of short and long range budgets, and (3) an examination of current curricular practices. The Unit Leaders, who made up the membership of the IIC, were encouraged by what was presented and plans were established for its application.

A Budget Task Force was formed. The task force

included one teacher from each of the six units, a classified employee, the building Principal, the Curriculum Coordinator and the Assistant Superintendent. In the first meeting it was decided that release days would be the most effective way of establishing the budget. A timeline was developed which included the release days and the brainstorming sessions which would preceed them.

Seven 30 minute brainstorming sessions were held, one each with the teachers and aides that made up each unit and one with the the non-instructional classified staff of the school. In order to provide each unit with direction participants were asked to reflect on three areas: (1) the current state of the school curricula; (2) the strengths and weaknesses of the present programs; and (3) the modifications that would be necessary to bring the school to an ideal state. Initially, the staff members were to respond to a fourth question which would focus discussions on their personal educational philosophies. This item was eliminated and the school philosophy was wisely substituted.

For many of the staff, this was the first time that they had actually had a legitimate need to refer to the philosophy of the school. Many had seen the school philosophy but few had utilized the directionality which it offered in the implementation of classroom programming. If the program planning budget process was to have any validity, the school philosophy had to provide guidance to

its development and implementation.

After reviewing the philososophy with each unit, the members of the session were encouraged to brainstorm about their needs and the needs of the entire school program. This meant that the Kindergarten Unit could have input into budget priorities of another grade level unit, the Allied Arts Unit, or the Instructional Support Unit. The participants were also informed that they could bring up any concern, regardless of cost or of the perceived feasibility.

Once each group understood the parameters of the session, the unit was divided into two smaller groups, each of which brainstormed separately. The division of the unit accomplished two objectives: (1) it eliminated the possibility that one person or part of the unit would dominate the session, and (2) added validity to responses which were mentioned by both halves of the unit in their separate meetings. Originally, worksheets had been designed on which participants could record information of importance to them. It was found that the sessions proceeded more quickly if one person acted as secretary. The responses of the two sessions were then presented side-by-side for inspection and future reference by the Budget Task Force.

During the first release day, the Budget Task Force met to examine the results of the various brainstorming

sessions. Since six of the members were classroom teachers and needed substitutes, one-half of the group met during each half of the day. Although this was at first viewed as a problem, this split grouping actually added to the budget refinement process. Under a common leadership, each group had opportunities to react to the other's interpretation and organization of the brainstorming data.

The brainstorming data formed a needs assessment which the Budget Task Force organized and synthesized into a cohesive document. Beginning with the school philosophy, the task force began by categorizing each needs statement under one of the eight philosophy goals. The process was complicated and took more time than originally planned because the budget needs assessment included both objective and activity statements. This work was simplified when instead of an item-by-item analysis, the committee treated the needs assessment data holistically.

The first objectives to be formalized described the general pedogogical strands which permeated the assessment document. These were areas of need which either formally or informally appeared most frequently. A formalized need was indicated by an objective statement, while an informal need was indicated by an activity or series of activities which could be coorelated to an unstated objective. This procedure provided the task force with important initial practice in categorization. More importantly, that practice provided

the neophite task force membership with a lower skill entry level since the general pedogogical strands were more readily assertainable. Additional objectives were then generated utilizing a similiar process but which analyzed the remaining need statements item-by-item.

Perhaps the most difficult quality to maintain in the task force at this point was objectivity. While the task force agreed to address the formal needs expressed in the general curriculum strands, there appeared to be more value judgements and philosophical discussions as to the feasibility or importance of subsequent need statements. At this juncture, directing and redirecting the focus of discussions became paramount, since a time element was the single-most critical constraint of the group.

Once all needs statements had been reviewed and catergorized by the Budget Task Force, it was realized that three of the original philosophy goals had not been addressed. The task force examined these goals and discussed their importance. They noted that the lack of need statements indicated a low budget priority but decided that all goals must be addressed. In generating short term objective and activity statements for each of the goals, they recommended that two of the philosophy goals be restated as one. This recommendation was accepted and the school philosophy was modified accordingly.

The final assignment of the Budget Task Force was to prioritize the objectives and activities and to develop an action statement for each activity. Each action statement would indicate the year in which the activity would be addressed or if it would be held for future study. A one, three, and five year budget plan was established. The action statement also indicated: (1) the amount of the budgetary commitment; (2) a description of an administrative action; or (3) a combination of both.

The entire budget planning process was completed over a span of three weeks. During these three weeks, the staff of the Primary School began to realize the power and limitations of the school budget. Through this process, the staff accepted an informal ownership for effective budget planning. As a result of their participation in this structured approach: (1) comprehension, justifiable short and long term budgets were established; (2) alternative financing was identified; (3) creative reprogramming of personnel assignments will be considered; and (4) the school philosophy was refined.

School administrators have the awesome responsibility of making all the pedogogical pieces fit cohesively. This is particularly important for reservation schools, which because of the uniqueness environment and student needs must often establish their own direction. However; administrators must remember that quality programming can be

effectively achieved only with adequate preparation. A sound budget, based on an effective school philosophy, is the most important component.

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